

# Houston 311





Houston 311  
Houston, Texas USA  
[www.Houstontx.gov](http://www.Houstontx.gov)

Industry .....	Government
City of Houston, TX .....	2 million citizens
Number of Agents .....	70
Customer Interactions ...	2 million annually

As populations across the U.S. continue to grow, a number of cities are implementing new ways for residents to access government services, primarily ones aimed at non-emergency information and general community assistance. Recently, the need to provide ready access to local government services has been elevated due to natural disasters including hurricanes and catastrophic flooding in parts of the U.S.

In Houston, Texas, the fourth largest city in the U.S., more than 2 million residents, as well as businesses and tourists, have access to the city's Houston 311 Service Helpline. The helpline is a way for people to report non-emergency problems such as potholes, abandoned cars or litter. They can also get information on local government services, such as recycling or how to pay a parking ticket. The primary goal of Houston 311 is to provide a single point for constituents to contact the City of Houston for a wide variety of

needs and connect them to the appropriate city department. "The 311 helpline is available to assist our constituents with routine inquiries, and also for special situations, such as the city's Amnesty Program or flu vaccines," explained Gloria Bingham, Director, Houston 311.

Houston implemented their 311 helpline in 2001 as a way to deflect non-emergency calls away from an overburdened 911 system, as well as improve community relations and support by offering easier access to government services. They hoped that centralizing calls to one main system would help decrease calls to other government departments to improve community service and provide better control overall management costs.

"Most people look at government as an organization with several layers and a great deal of bureaucracy," said Bingham. "We wanted to change that perception. Our goal with 311 was to create a one-

*“We achieved a system where incoming calls can be answered quickly and issues resolved quickly, while still maintaining exceptional customer service. Residents like and use the system, which is a huge measure of success.”*

Gloria Bingham Director, Houston 311

stop shopping concept designed to improve government services in the city of Houston.”



## Challenge

To implement the 311 system, Bingham and her team had to centralize the city’s customer service operations and the contact center for government services. This allowed elimination of many issues caused by the city’s existing decentralized customer service system.

Prior to establishing the Houston 311 system, people calling in for assistance often had to call multiple different phone numbers before reaching the correct destination, causing high levels of citizen frustration and increasing the time city employees spent on the phone with people trying to resolve their issues. In addition, data from the multiple, decentralized city offices and contact centers was not integrated, and not all agents had access to citywide data which caused further

delays in helping callers with inquiries. Often when a caller finally reached the right destination, agents within the contact center had to transfer the call internally, to reach the right individual.

“Callers would contact a city department and get one answer from one employee, but with the decentralized system, if they were transferred to another department, they were often given an entirely different response,” said Bingham. “We didn’t have unified applications that allowed city employees and agents to view the same information and it caused a lot of problems.”

The city also needed better communication with its many Spanish-speaking residents. With a large Spanish-speaking population in Houston, Bingham and her team were well aware that they needed to better serve this large concentration of the city’s population. Because the city didn’t have sufficient staffing of bi-lingual agents, Spanish-speaking callers were often forced to keep phoning different



## Challenge:

- > Provide community with central contact for local government services and increase support for Spanish-speaking residents
- > Data from multiple, decentralized city offices was not integrated and caused delays in resolving caller inquiries
- > Needed to remain responsive and available to citizens during emergency events such as Hurricanes which increase demand for city services



departments until they reached someone that could speak their language.

On the contact center management side, Bingham wanted a system that would track performance and accountability of call agents. Agents are tested when they are hired by the city to determine their skill level and are then classified within a skill level. To better track the quality of service based on agent skills, Bingham needed to be able to provide accurate reporting on agent performance, within different skill levels.



## Solution

To kick off the new 311 system, Houston consolidated over 700 phone numbers from the city's blue pages down to a few. To best handle the high volume of daily incoming calls to 311, the city considered a number of suppliers before selecting Genesys for its contact center solution. One of the main draws for the Genesys suite of products

was the open-platform design that would allow Houston to integrate its existing legacy systems and CRM solutions with the new Genesys platform.

"Genesys stood apart from the crowd in large part because of its open platform," said Bingham. "Because the contact center solutions were so easy to integrate with our existing infrastructure, it made the implementation very smooth."

Bingham chose the Genesys Customer Interaction Suite including the Genesys Voice Platform (Enterprise Edition), Inbound Voice, Voice Treatment Option, and Workforce Management. Driven by the Genesys Customer Interaction Management platform, Genesys offered a flexible platform featuring intelligent routing, assisted-service, integration options and strong management reporting.

Genesys Inbound Voice now manages all incoming 311 calls and delivers the caller to the right agent, based on caller input to the Integrated Voice

## Results:

- > Successfully centralized city government service delivery and communications to 2 million residents
- > Achieved 91% successful call answer rate
- > Reduced average caller wait-time from 3 minutes to 12 seconds
- > Maintained quality service delivery during huge spikes in call volumes during natural disasters

Response (IVR) system. When wait times are long, a Voice Treatment Option plays back the estimated wait time to the caller, helping to manage frustration with long hold times.

The Genesys intelligent skills-based call routing is ideal for determining the best agent for each interaction. Houston 311 uses this capability to route Spanish-speaking callers to Spanish-speaking contact center agents with the ability to handle inquiries in the callers' native language.

To handle spikes in call volume activity which may occur during various times of the year, the Genesys Workforce Management program allows the city of Houston to match staffing levels to call volume, not only offering the customer a better experience but also providing increased job satisfaction to agents.

Additionally, with Genesys Workforce Management, Houston can access reporting features and leverage

real-time statistics and data to monitor agent performance. The data is used to display the agents call queue time on a large electronic board in the contact center so performance is tracked in real-time which ultimately improves service to residents.



## Results

The new open platform contact center solution by Genesys has helped the city of Houston centralize their government services communication efforts and successfully deployed the 311 Houston service helpline system.

The city's fully staffed contact center has 70 agents which now handle more than 2 million calls and e-mails a year. Caller wait time for government services through 311 has been reduced from 3 to 4 minutes down to an amazing 10-12 seconds, falling easily within the city's primary goal of answering each call within 30 seconds of receipt. Additionally,

## Genesys Solution:

- > **Genesys Customer Interaction Management Platform** captures, processes, routes and reports on all interactions
- > **Genesys Voice Platform** provides intelligent call routing with assisted or self service options
- > **Genesys Workforce Management** matches staffing levels to call volumes, provides management reporting and real-time statistics
- > **Genesys Inbound Voice** manages all incoming calls and delivers callers to the right agent

Houston 311 has reduced the average time needed to create a service request order while online with a customer to just 21 seconds and has reduced the occurrence of customer call abandonment by significantly improving response times to caller inquiries.

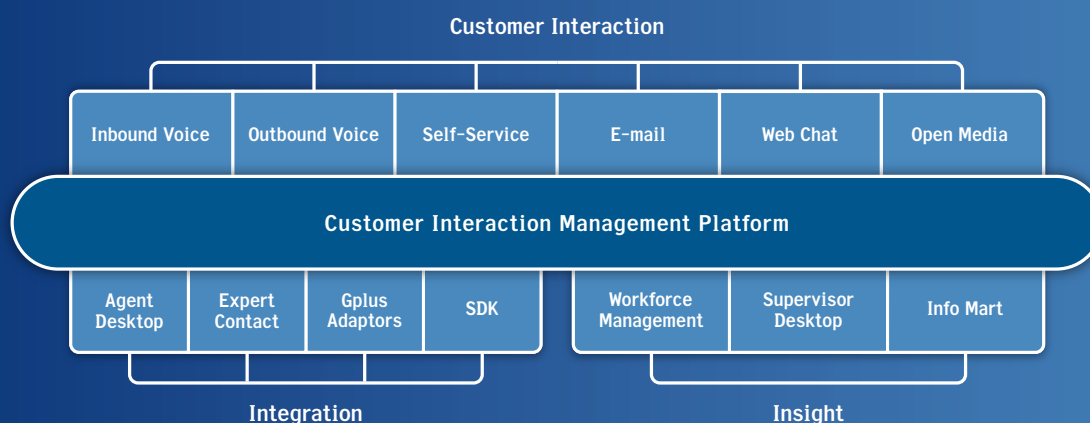
Other metrics Bingham and her staff continue to track include the length of time in queue, quality of interaction, average time to process information on a call and first call resolution—all metrics designed to further improve community service and relations by offering easier access to government services.

“We achieved a system where incoming calls can be answered quickly and issues resolved quickly, while still maintaining exceptional customer service,” said Bingham. “Residents like and use the system, which is a huge measure of success.”

In fiscal year 2004, 311 received more than 2 million calls, with a 91 percent answer rate. This is a 3.43 percent decrease in total calls received, and a 4.37 percent increase in calls answered compared to fiscal year 2003. The 311 contact center anticipates answering nearly 100 percent of all incoming calls in fiscal year 2005 as staffing levels grow and new agent call-handling skills increase.

Electronic requests to 311 have become another popular form of communicating with the Houston’s call center for residents and internal customers alike. E-mail has progressively increased in volume since the option was first offered in September 2001.

“Customers appreciate e-mail because they have an electronic record to show the original request and the response provided by 311,” said Bingham. “And, departments like e-mail because it is easier for staff to understand the customer problems based on how they made the request.”



### Genesys Product Suite

Genesys provides an open system platform designed to integrate with more hardware and software applications than any other leading contact center software company.

“By having 311 in place, we’ve been able to better meet the demands of our rapid growth and we’ve been able to provide better accountability and greater response time, which is a positive step for the city of Houston,” said Bingham. “We couldn’t have made such strides without the Genesys solutions and for that, we’re very grateful.”

In addition, Genesys helped Houston city government to remain responsive and available during recent, severe hurricanes which hit the region. Bingham was pleased with the performance of Genesys in effectively handling the overwhelming number of calls the agency received during Hurricane’s Katrina and Rita. Evacuees from surrounding gulf coast states utilized Houston’s 311 system extensively before and after the storms to obtain information about evacuation assistance. With the Genesys solution, the call center was able to respond to more than 100,000 citizens over a 5-day period as daily call

volumes soared from an average of 10,000 to over 21,000 calls per day.

“The Genesys Voice treatment option allowed citizens the option of staying on the line until an operator could assist them or to call back at a lower peak time. If we didn’t have advanced contact center solutions in place, the general population may have viewed the city government as unavailable during disastrous times and with the help of Genesys, Houston 311 stood the test,” said Bingham.

With the success of Houston 311, Bingham and her team are looking to expand their contact center solutions in the coming year. “During 2006, we expect to expand our voice self service offering, explore the e-mail intelligent routing component, and we are currently devising a plan to integrate additional departments into the 311 customer request system,” said Bingham.

Genesys is the world's #1  
contact center software company

- 9 of the 25 world's largest utility companies run Genesys
- 4 of the 15 world's largest energy companies run Genesys
- 4 of the 5 world's largest commercial banks run Genesys



## Genesys Overview

Genesys, an Alcatel Company, is 100 percent focused on software for contact centers. Leading companies in the Global 500 and Fortune 1000 use Genesys to optimize interactions that drive better business. With 3,000 customers in 80 countries, Genesys directs more than 100 million customer interactions every day helping organizations achieve key business goals by optimizing customer interactions, enhancing employee performance and improving operational efficiency. Genesys solutions are available in both traditional telephony and IP environments.

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## Additional Information

To learn more about Genesys solutions, please visit [www.genesyslab.com](http://www.genesyslab.com)